

BLIND STUDENT IN THE HIGH SCHOOL
by
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HOUSE FOR THE BLIND**

(19) They are excessively endowed with animal spirits. Very little of it is sublimated in concentrated study. Hence, occasional outbursts must not be too severely punished. They need not be ignored. But they must be seen in proper perspective, not as the expression of viciousness but merely as the result of a pent-up, healthy animalism.

(20) They do not like to be snooped at or watched too meticulously. The closer the teacher approximates the policeman, the more they are driven to find means of outwitting him. The best possible procedure is to make it impossible or inadvisable for them to cheat or bluff. The course can be so organized that a premium is put upon daily application to effort. The end can be made unattainable without his rigorous application. To cheat is to unfit oneself for the test. This they must

learn through the daily recitation, not through precept. They learn quickly when it is to their interest.

Nearly all of these undesirable traits can be made to serve useful social and individual purposes if the teacher is one who represents to these boys an ideal towards which they can strive. They are enormously pliable when once they have a rallying point for their affections. They can be made to talk, act and think like gentlemen, if they like the teacher. The formula for progress with these boys is Lecky's aphorism, "Let not the sour-faced teach morality." Reversing this, I should say, "Let only the sweet-faced teach morality." For only those whom these boys like can ever begin to approach them on any really significant plane.

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THE BLIND STUDENT IN THE HIGH SCHOOL

THE keynote of the new attitude to the handicapped child is summed up in the "Bill of Rights for the Handicapped Child" enunciated at the White House Conference on Child Health and Protection (1930). According to this, the handicapped child has a right . . .

"To as vigorous a body as human skill can give him.

"To grow up in a world which does not set him apart, which looks at

him, not with scorn or pity or ridicule — but which welcomes him, exactly as it welcomes every child, and offers him identical experiences.

"To a life on which his handicap casts no shadow, but which is full day by day with those things which make it worth while, with comradeship, love, work, play, laughter, and tears—a life in which these things bring contin-

ually increasing growth, richness, release of energies, joy in achievement."

Although the blind constitute the smallest fraction of the student population, they form, nevertheless, a conspicuous element in the school body and assume an importance disproportionate to their actual numbers. The old conception that the loss of vision produces such a radical change in one's temperament as to remove one from the ordinary currents of life is fast sinking into oblivion. Rapidly disappearing, too, is the old picture of the blind man, weak, helpless, soliciting alms, inviting pity, appealing for assistance and direction. In its place, has been substituted the realization that every blind man, woman, and child is an integral part of the human family, a reputable member of society, merely carrying a physical handicap that can be and is being relieved by proper adjustment. We are fast getting away from treating the blind man as a strange being who can enjoy only a very restricted kind of life.

From this, has sprung the demand to educate the blind in a school for the seeing. The care of blind children in a residential school for the blind is objectionable on several grounds. Primarily, it is out of place in modern conceptions of the treatment of the child in present day psychology and child welfare. It imparts a marked "institutionalized"

point of view, idealizing the world of actuality and undervaluing the severity of its conditions. Perhaps there is no greater tragedy than to bring up a group of blind children to come in contact with none but the blind. Like anybody else, the blind child must judge all the world by that part of the world with which he comes in contact. If the blind child's only contact with the outside world is the occasional visitor to the institution glibly offering consolation to the little fellow in his darkness, we must expect him to anticipate such a greeting when he leaves his cloistered surroundings. Segregation, the very essence of a school for the blind, produces an egregiously distorted personality. It tends to deepen the chasm which divides the blind child from the rest of the world in which the greater part of his life must be spent. Then, too, the residential school for the blind removes the child from a normal home environment and does not provide healthful social conditions, especially through association with normal children. Unfortunately, it teaches the blind child the use of such materials and apparatus as are not likely to be available in later life. Finally, if the sightless child is to make his own living in the world of the seeing, the ultimate aim, we must accustom both the blind and the seeing to this association.

Blind students who come to Evander Childs High School are eminently prepared to carry on their academic

work. For this, great praise must be extended to the special teachers of the blind in the elementary and junior high schools whose unceasing efforts have broken down the barriers incident to the physical condition of those to whom nature has not been so bountiful. In effect, the gap existing between the elementary and the senior high school has been reduced to its lowest possible limits. The blind student has been taught that he is on his own responsibility as far as getting assignments and fulfilling them is concerned. He is aware that the equipment of his special room is at his disposal in completing his work. As for classroom procedure, he participates on the same basis as a child with normal vision. He enters and leaves the classroom punctually and with the least possible disturbance. He is appreciative and helpful in his attitude toward teachers and pupils. He does not invite unbounded admiration or maudlin pity. The fact that he comes to school alone and gets about the building by himself is taken for granted. The employment of guides about the building is discouraged. The circular system of traffic in use in our building enables the sightless student to find his classroom with a minimum of difficulty. The following quotation, taken from an article written by one of our blind students for BRIDGE, a school publication, well describes how adept the blind are in orienting themselves in new surroundings:

"My ability to travel about the school and unfailingly find the proper room is not to be wondered at. I have simply set myself to study the layout of the school and to take note where each room is located. Then, as a further aid, I have memorized the numerical order of the rooms on the different floors as well as the position of the staircases, elevator, and so forth, that interrupt the orderly arrangement of the doors. Of course, this is not possible without 'good sense of direction' which most blind people either possess or develop if they lack it. Consequently, with my sense of direction and with some reliance on the unexplainable 'sixth sense,' I soon became acquainted with a mental picture of the school. After having gone through a short period of trial and error, during which period I made a few mistakes, I found myself able to go anywhere."

The tools at the disposal of the blind are marvelously simple, ranging from the fundamental braille symbol to the mechanically perfect Talking Book. The sixty-three characters which the generating sign furnishes is the key to the embossed volume. The stylus, slate, and paper are their "pencil and notebook." The Arithmetic Slate does away with the servitude of mental calculations. The Braille Writer is to them what the typewriter is to the sighted. The instrument for raised diagrams, so necessary in geometry and the sciences,

is the tracing wheel. A supplementary device for revealing the treasure-house of good literature is the newly marketed Talking Book. These remarkable "books" are recorded on thin disks so that a complete book of average length can be contained on a set of fourteen records.

Practically none of the textbook material used by our blind children is available in Braille. All this must be made available by recopying by hand or on the Braille Writer. The New York Chapter of the American Red Cross through its untiring staff of volunteer workers has been most helpful in the matter of transcribing the printed page into a form that can be used by the sightless student.

All our blind students show a strong liking for the sciences. The sightless pupils naturally gravitate to them, filling as they do a felt need in their circumscribed lives. Specifically, the sciences acquaint them with their environment; they foster confidence in the natural world about them; they afford them the best possible interpretation of their surroundings and so organize their common experiences as to make them directly useful. They teach appreciation of nature by the aid of the senses of touch, taste, smell and hearing. They help create for them a love of nature and of living things which will add interest to their restricted lives and tend to keep them pleasantly occupied in the fresh air.

A blind student compares favorably with the seeing student where

academic studies are concerned, but when it comes to recreation, especially physically, the seeing student has a decided advantage. With the knowledge that decreased activity and vitality from loss of vision may interact, we have organized a special health education class. Here the blind student does not suffer from lack of motor stimulation and motivation for physical activity. Prospects of actual team competition provide strong incentives to the group. This wholesome rivalry is commonplace on the school athletic field where modified baseball, football, etc., are played. Sides are chosen from among the blind, a few seeing students pitching in to oil the more delicate maneuvers of the games. In addition, one period a week is devoted to swimming, which furnishes the blind with a pastime and a form of physical recreation which they can enjoy on an equal basis with the sighted.

No end of encouragement is given the blind student to develop a hobby. It is scientifically true that the range of vision and the range of interests are inter-related, gradually narrowing into a highly constricted sphere with the decrease in sight. When sight is entirely gone, work and play must be within the reach of the hand or hearing. Blindness borrows trouble. Its victims are overcome by self-pity. Frequently, there is a flagging of energy resulting in idleness, morbidity, and ennui. It is no wonder then that the reality of leisure and solitude be-

comes fearful and repellent. Hence, the problem resolves itself into widening the blind child's circle of interests, making him better company for himself and for society. We have struggled with the problem of leisure with some measure of success. One of our blind students who is now completing a year of chemistry has done considerable outside reading in this field. He has also made an interesting collection of lenses and has an intimate knowledge of the relation between curvature and refraction. Another student has built a balanced aquarium in conjunction with a seeing friend. Still another has made a hobby of psychology. Most of them have "gone in" for good music, the better programs on the radio serving as the medium. Every blind student is a member of at least one club or

shares in some school activity. All of our former graduates can point to rich and varied contacts in our school.

In conclusion, we feel that the protection of the blind child's personality is the most important phase of his school training. Can we help our pupils to form socially acceptable habits in school? Can we aid them to happier adjustments? Can we guide them in developing into socially desirable companions in school and at home? We seek to develop a social sense of membership in a group sharing similar ideas, abilities, and defects. We are trying to insure for these blind students a more complete development of their faculties, that they may know the dignity and the joys of useful activity.

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LEGAL RIGHTS AND LIABILITIES OF TEACHERS FOR INJURIES TO STUDENTS

WHAT is the legal status of a teacher for an injury to a student under his care? What are his legal rights and liabilities for accidents occurring in and out of the classroom to students under his supervision? What is his legal relationship to the Board of Education? Is the Board responsible and answerable for the negligent acts of its teachers? These are important questions, the answers to which teachers should be apprised of. It is the purpose of this

article to endeavor to answer these questions and to shed some light on other legal problems that might affect the teacher in his profession.

In combing the law books, I was surprised to find that actions instituted against teachers were very few in number. Are we to infer that teachers have not been sued? Generally speaking, the answer is in the affirmative. However, it is my opinion that teachers have been sued, but their cases have not reached trial be-

cause of a settlement or a compromise. Teachers, either through their ignorance of the law or because of their earnest desire to avoid litigation and its harassing concomitants, have been willing to settle the claim out of court. Lawyers are well aware of this fact and mark the teacher as an easy prey.

From the legal aspect, it is important to know that teachers are not the agents of the State or of the Board of Education in carrying out its educational program. Their relationship is not that of agent and principal but that of independent contractors and as such, they are liable for their own negligent acts. The theory of *respondeat superior* does not apply to teachers. An example of the operation of this theory will make clear its application. A, an employee of B, in driving B's truck negligently injures a third party. The third party can sue B, the employer, for all damages resulting from the injury. The law imposes a liability upon the employer for the negligent acts of his employees or agents committed within the scope of their employment. This theory is not applicable to teachers. They are independently liable for injuries sustained by students committed to their care and supervision, if such injuries are the proximate result of their negligence. The courts have maintained that the Board of Education is a governmental agency of the State and, as such, it is not responsible for the tortious acts

of its teachers. However, the Board remains liable for its own negligence in performing a duty imposed upon it by law. For a violation of such statutory duty, the Board of Education is answerable. The cases of *Herman vs. Board of Education* and *Johnson vs. Board of Education* bear out this principle of law.

In the case of *Herman vs. Board of Education*, the plaintiff, a pupil in the manual training department of a high school, was injured while operating an unguarded buzz saw as part of his work. The Board was charged with negligence in allowing an unguarded buzz saw to be used in violation of the Labor Law. The court held the Board liable for its negligent omission to do, or for doing in a negligent manner, what it undertook to do. Quoting the opinion of the Court: "The State has not created an irresponsible instrumentality of government and invested it with the power to put children at work at dangerous machinery which it would be a statutory offense against its laws to use in private industries." In the case of *Johnson vs. Board of Education*, plaintiff was injured while using a buzz saw in the manual training department of a high school. The plaintiff sued the Board for the injuries sustained. In this case the weight of the evidence showed that the saw was furnished with a hood (guard), that it complied with the requirements of the Labor Law and the rules of the labor department, that

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